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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the transfer of students from California community colleges to four-year colleges and universities. Following a brief introduction to laws and procedures specified upon the inception of community colleges in California in 1910, and a recognition of the difficulty in student transfer throughout the history of higher education institutions, the article discusses the calculation of transfer rates and their variation among the states. Nationally, rates are low where community colleges have been organized as vocational centers, as in Indiana, and high where they are closely articulated with the state's university system, as in West Virginia. Influences on transfer from California community colleges include: (1) affordability, which enhances access but also allows for inconsistent attendance; (2) disparity between college and university fees; (3) system policies, specifically the prerequisite of two years of full-time study completed prior to transfer; and (4) the dual university system, including liberal arts and non-liberal arts classes. A primary forthcoming issue on transfer is whether California's interest is to have more students transfer from community colleges to the University of California and California State University. If so, the state legislature, community colleges, and universities can take several actions, which are outlined in this document. (AS)

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Transfer from California Community Colleges

Presentation by Arthur M. Cohen to
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The transfer of students from community colleges to universities in California has been a prominent feature of the state's higher education system since early in the century. The original California law authorizing secondary school boards to offer post-graduate courses specified that those courses "shall approximate the studies prescribed in the first two years of university courses." When Fresno organized its junior college in 1910, one of its presenting arguments was that there was no university within nearly 200 miles of the city and that its young people needed a local institution in which they could begin their postsecondary studies. The presumption then, as since, was that students would be enabled to take freshman and sophomore courses in their hometown and then those who wished would subsequently migrate to the state's universities.

As the junior colleges spread through the state they served as the point of first entry to higher education for most of the students attending them. However, the junior colleges were organized originally as part of the secondary school system, operating under local governing boards, and the notion of systematic free flow between them and the universities never quite established itself.

Throughout the history of the institutions the difficulty in student transfer was recognized repeatedly. During the 1960s, when higher education was expanding rapidly, the exchange of students and student credits among the sectors became a major item of debate in state meetings. As only one example among many, a 1966 *Los Angeles Times* article began, "The University of California and the California State Colleges came under fire Monday for making students' transfers from the state's junior colleges too difficult."

The University of California generally supported the establishment of the junior colleges because they freed it from having to be concerned with enrollment pressures in the lower division. The intention was for the junior colleges to admit the majority of the first-time enrollees, sort through to determine which ones were suited for baccalaureate studies, provide remedial education for those who were not, and thus relieve the university to concentrate on other educational functions. The junior colleges thrived on this type of support. Over 30 years ago the Coordinating Council for Higher Education "recommended that the University of California encourage applicants to attend junior colleges in order to ease enrollment pressures in the lower division." The California Master Plan for Higher Education also had called for the diversion of substantial numbers of students to junior colleges where they could find undergraduate courses enabling them to begin their collegiate careers.

These arrangements helped to build California public higher education into the most accessible system in the nation. The community colleges could not function as the point of first entry to higher education for most of the people who begin postsecondary study in California if their students did not have a reasonable expectation of transferring after completing a certain number of lower division courses. And because the 1989 Master Plan revision restated the necessity for the universities making place for qualified transfers, those expectations remain in effect.

TRANSFER RATES:

How many students transfer? Information on the number of students beginning their higher education in a community college and subsequently moving on to a university is essential if the effects of state and institutional policies are to be assessed. How much does a newly installed program articulation agreement affect student flow? What are guaranteed student placements at the university worth in terms of enhanced transfer?

For the past nine years the Center for the Study of Community Colleges (CSCC) has tracked transfer across the nation. After reviewing numerous ways of calculating transfer rates, the CSCC staff standardized the definition as *all students entering the two-year college in a given year who have no prior college experience and who complete at least 12 college credit units, divided into the number of that group who take one or more classes at a university within four years*. According to that definition California's transfer rate is 21 percent, slightly lower than the nationwide average of 22 percent (table 1). These are undercounts because they do not include students who take more than four years to transfer, those who transfer to independent universities, or those who leave the state.

The rate of transfer varies greatly among the states. It is low where the colleges have been organized as vocational centers, as in Indiana, high where they are closely articulated with the state's university system, as in West Virginia. California's rate is in line with several of the large states (Illinois and New Jersey, for example), lower than Washington's, higher than

Florida's. However, California falls short in the percentage of students attaining twelve credits within four years of entry: 34 percent vs. 47 percent for the nation as a whole.

Just as the national data mask the differences between states, the statewide data do not reveal the differences between colleges. Transfer rates in California community colleges range from a low of 4 percent to a high of 37 percent. Why these differences? Much relates to institutional emphasis; one would not expect a college that emphasizes vocational studies to have a high transfer rate. Much relates to location; colleges 100 miles distant from a UC or CSU campus typically send fewer students than those with a university nearby. Much relates to institutional history; a college located in a community that has sent few of its young people to higher education continues not to be perceived as the ideal point of entry even as demography and rates of college going change.

INFLUENCES ON TRANSFER

Overall, the year-to-year stability in transfer rates and the comparability of California with the rest of the nation are remarkable. The minuscule tuition in California enhances access but it also allows the students to wander in and out of the community colleges, to leave without completing any courses and to return with practically no fiscal penalty. A student may take a course at low cost merely for personal interest; signing up for a college-credit physical education class makes the college's swimming pool and weight room available for less than the cost of a private health club. California probably has a higher proportion of casual, non-degree-oriented

students than any other state. Certainly it has a higher proportion of students in physical education courses.

The difference between California's college and university fees is also disparate. The college fees are so low in comparison with the university tuition that a student moving from one to the other faces as much as a tenfold increase. In Texas, the university fees average only around $300 per year more than those at the colleges.

The systems' policies also affect transfer rates. A student who enters a community college in Illinois may transfer to a public university at any time; no minimum number of credits is required. In California the student may not transfer until completing essentially two years of full time study.

California's dual university system may also contribute to its transfer rate. The community colleges each have varying numbers of courses for which a student may receive graduation credit at CSU and other numbers of courses for which credit may be transferred to UC. Overall, the liberal arts account for 59 percent of the curriculum in California community colleges, higher than the national average of 55 percent (table 2) and nearly all of those courses transfer to both CSU and UC. However, there is a marked difference in transferability of non-liberal arts classes (table 3); 70 percent are accepted by CSU, 25 percent by UC. And the gap has widened: the comparable figures in 1991 were 62 percent and 29 percent. The major reason for the disparity is that CSU has more baccalaureate programs in business and technologies

similar to those emphasized in community colleges. The effect is markedly different rates of transfer, with CSU receiving five times as many transfers as UC.

FORTHCOMING ISSUES ON TRANSFER

The key question in examining transfer rates and state policies affecting them is, *Is it in the state's interest to have more students transfer from community colleges to UC and CSU?* If so, then several actions can be taken by the legislature and the community colleges.

The legislature could provide special incentives such as financial aid coverage for full- and part-time students across sectors. It could also offer a bounty in the form of supplemental funds to any college that increased its rate of transfer beyond the baseline percentage derived from its prior years' rate.

The colleges could take certain actions:

- increase recruitment efforts in their feeder high schools;

- beginning with the programs from which most students transfer, establish college-faculty to university-faculty committees so that curriculum and concurrent enrollment for students are articulated;

- send lists annually to neighboring university campuses reporting pertinent data about students who will be eligible for transfer and who choose to be included;

- schedule a few second-tier, sophomore-level classes on a neighboring university's campus;

- make more on-campus employment opportunities available to students, thereby encouraging the students to participate in college life.

The universities could:

- give full credit toward the baccalaureate for up to 60 units of college-level study completed with a minimum grade;

- modify their junior-class admission requirements by adding the associate degree and giving the community colleges the responsibility for maintaining curriculum appropriate to the baccalaureate, thus recognizing the degree as a full-faith ticket of admission to the university.

- guarantee a place in the junior class for all students who met the criteria;

These recommendations reflect projects and programs that have been implemented piecemeal in California and elsewhere. If they were effected statewide, the foundation for the transfer function would be strengthened and transfer rates would undoubtedly rise.

If budgetary issues do not force the universities to cap enrollments (a big "If"), the next few years will see a surge in transfer rates. All the elements to support it are in place:

- the number of 18 year-olds in the state will increase;

- the colleges will not have the fiscal luxury of expanding into new areas of service outside the mainstream of traditional curriculum;

- there will be less competition from UC and CSU for well-qualified freshmen;

The influence of these phenomena should be traced, not because community college transfer studies are more important than job-entry programs (all the studies of California higher education done over the decades point to both as essential functions), but because reliable estimates of college contributions in both areas can be made only if valid, readily understandable data are put forward routinely.

In summation, UC and CSU will not expand their freshman classes nearly enough to satisfy the demand for baccalaureate studies. The choice for most young people will continue to be entry through the community colleges, just as it has been throughout most of the century.

Table 1. Summary of Transfer Rates for California and the Nation

Entrants	California	National
1984	20.3	23.7
1985	23.0	23.6
1986	20.8	23.4
1987	22.0	22.6
1988	19.1	22.1
1989	19.0	21.5
1990	21.0	21.8

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Table 2a. Spring Term Courses Offered in California Community Colleges

	1991 (N=28)	1998 (N=26)
Average # of Sections per College	1,184	1,274
Total # of Sections	33,140	33,146
Total # of Liberal Arts Sections	20,596	19,570
Total # of Non-Liberal Arts Sections	12,544	13,576
Percent Liberal Arts	62%	59%
Percent Non-Liberal Arts	38%	41%

Table 2b. Spring Term Courses Offered in Community Colleges Nationwide

	1991 (N=164)	1998 (N=164)
Percent Liberal Arts	57%	55%
Percent Non-Liberal Arts	43%	45%

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Table 3. Transferability of California Non-Liberal Arts Courses, Spring, 1998

Transfer Subject Area	CSU	UC
Agriculture	80.0%	7.7%
Business and Office	71.8	27.6
Marketing and Distribution	85.4	0
Health	72.4	23.8
Technical Education	69.5	3.4
Engineering and Science Technology	69.3	0.9
Trade and Industry	53.6	3.1
Personal Skills and Avocational	87.7	72.5
Education	82.0	10.1
Criminal Justice	61.1	15.5
Other	86.7	3.3
Internships/Practicums	64.2	1.2
Overall Transferability	70.0%	24.8%

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